

**Outcomes Research Report #8
Child Maltreatment
In Foster Care**

OKDHS Children and Family Services Division

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Child Maltreatment in Foster Care

I. Introduction

This study examines rates of maltreatment of children in out of home placement in Oklahoma during the years 1998-2001. The report first examines trends in Oklahoma's performance on the federal child maltreatment in foster care measure over four years. Performance trends are also examined for each administrative area within the state for the same four year period. All performance rates are compared to the federal standard for Safety in Foster Care stating that 0.57%, or fewer, of the children in foster care should experience maltreatment by a foster parent.

For the second analysis in this report, a random sample of children in foster care was drawn to permit comparisons between all children in foster care in Oklahoma and the much smaller group of children experiencing maltreatment in foster care. This analysis compares these two groups of children for demographic differences and similarities such as age and gender. The maltreatment in foster care group is further described in terms of perpetrator characteristics, maltreatment type, and substantiation rates.

Of the six child welfare performance measures for which the Federal Department of Health and Human Services hold states accountable, only one measure, Safety in Foster Care, is derived from both the Adoption and Foster Care Reporting (AFCARS) and National Child Abuse and Neglect Data (NCANDS) reporting systems. Child maltreatment in foster care is a rate or percentage calculated by dividing the number of children maltreated by a foster parent or residential facility staff (NCANDS) by the population of children served in foster care for the same time period (AFCARS). In this

case, the time period is the first nine months of the calendar year. The nine month window encompasses the overlap between the AFCARS (October through September) and NCANDS (January through December) reporting years. State and federal rates of child maltreatment in foster care are compared to a national standard of 0.57% or fewer of children in foster care experiencing maltreatment by their foster caretaker. The experiences of children in foster care who are abused by their birth parents, relative caregivers, and other children are not included in this measure.

The maltreatment experiences of children in out of home placements are not well represented in the literature. Comparisons of the few extant studies are problematic, “because of differing definitions, reporting, and investigation procedures across and within jurisdictions” (Benedict, Zuravin, Brandt, & Abbey, 1994, p. 578). The denominators used to calculate maltreatment in foster care rates vary from study to study and are not always clearly described.

Further, differences among and within states in terms of the responses to and recording of reports of maltreatment of children in out of home placements impact the state and federal rates identified through the AFCARS and NCANDS reporting systems. It is most likely that the federal measure, as constructed, under estimates the rates of maltreatment of children in foster care. These rates may be under reported nationally for the following reasons:

- Some states (including Oklahoma) exclude maltreatment that occurs in residential and institutional facilities from their child protection reporting system.
- Relatives providing out of home care and caretakers other than foster parents (e.g., respite care providers) are sometimes excluded.

- Maltreatment by other children in the placement setting is not included in the measure.

As these analyses are specific to the state of Oklahoma, they are defined as Oklahoma policies and practices define maltreatment in foster care. In Oklahoma, reports of child maltreatment in residential and institutional settings are referred to a different agency for investigation. These incidents of maltreatment are not reported in NCANDS. Consequently, this report and its analyses pertain only to children in foster care who experienced maltreatment by a foster parent.

The introduction to Oklahoma's foster care maltreatment protocol succinctly summarizes the official state response to maltreatment in foster care.

Children who are in the care or custody of Department of Human Services (DHS) require ongoing protection from subsequent abuse or neglect while in therapeutic, emergency, and kinship foster care placement or trial adoptive placement. Children placed in care due to abuse or neglect are not only vulnerable due to their previous victimization but also due to the heightened risk of abuse or neglect that occurs when there is an out of home placement. It is, therefore, imperative that an evaluation and response be made when there is an observation or report of abuse or neglect or potential for abuse or neglect of a child in a foster or trial adoptive home.

The text then instructs DHS workers to follow the same protocol used when investigating reports made for children living in their own homes. All reports of maltreatment by a perpetrator other than the person responsible for the child's care are to be reported to law enforcement officials. All reports of maltreatment involving a child

in out of home placement are classified as Priority 1, indicating that investigation or assessment should be completed as soon as possible.

II. Review of the Literature

A likely explanation for the limited literature on maltreatment in foster care is simply that, in comparison to other federal outcome measures, very few children are directly affected by performance on this measure. Even for a state like Oklahoma with rates in excess of 100% higher than the federal standard, the actual number of children experiencing maltreatment in foster care is less than 200 per year. Despite their relatively small numbers, the federal government has placed a high priority on the safety of the vulnerable children in foster care by identifying this measure as one of the six performance measures for which state child welfare agencies are held accountable.

The available literature has examined the characteristics of foster parents and foster homes where foster children experience maltreatment. Other studies have examined characteristics of the maltreated foster child. A number of studies have examined all perpetrators of maltreatment of foster children, not just the foster parents. Studies have also evaluated substantiation rates and maltreatment types for children in foster care. This report will examine, for children maltreated in foster care, characteristics of the foster children, as well as characteristics of the perpetrating foster parents. Maltreatment types and substantiation rates for reports on maltreatment by foster parents are also reported.

The following paragraphs summarize the findings of other studies as they relate to foster homes, children experiencing maltreatment in foster care, perpetrators of

maltreatment of foster children, substantiation rates, and maltreatment types. While this report includes analyses of only foster parent perpetrators, findings from the literature pertaining to the incidence of maltreatment in foster care by other types of perpetrators are included in the literature review to provide additional context to the vulnerable status of children in out of home care.

Foster Homes. Carbino (1992) notes that foster homes are involved in only one percent of the national total of child maltreatment reports. This finding appears to be in proportion to the federal standard that 0.57% or fewer of the children in foster care should experience maltreatment at the hands of their caretaker. The federal measure does not include other classes of perpetrators. In a survey of 26 states, McFadden & Ryan (1991) found substantiation rates of 2-28 per 1000 licensed homes. Benedict, Zuravin, Brandt, & Abbey (1994) found that, while neglect was more common in the community, physical abuse and sexual abuse were more common in foster families. Carbino (1992) concluded that foster parents are held to higher standards, more closely scrutinized, and more likely to report and be reported on than other parents.

In general, researchers have found that children in foster care are at greater risk of further maltreatment than children who are not in foster care. Bolton, Laner & Gai (1981) found a higher incidence of maltreatment among foster families than in the general population, a seven percent risk for the foster care population versus a two percent risk for all other reports. They did not find a significant difference in risk for substantiation of reports for the two groups. Hobbs, Hobbs, & Wynne (1999) found that, in an English city, children in foster care were seven to eight times more likely to be assessed for abuse than children in the general population. Zuravin, Benedict, &

Somerfield (1993) found that Baltimore 'regular' foster homes were 2.4% more likely to have confirmed reports of maltreatment than relative or specialized foster homes. In a related study, Benedict, Zuravin, Brandt, & Abbey (1994) found that foster families were seven times more likely to be reported for physical abuse, four times more likely to be reported for sexual abuse and twice as likely to be reported for neglect as non-foster families. Rosenthal (1991), in a study of Colorado foster homes, concluded that there was no typical foster care maltreatment incident.

However, Runyan & Gould, (1985), in comparing the experiences of maltreated children who were placed with maltreated children who were not placed concluded that foster care reduced but did not eliminate risk for these children. They found that 25% of the children living at home experienced additional maltreatment while only 5% of the children living in foster care experienced additional maltreatment.

Children Experiencing Maltreatment in Foster Care. This survey of the existing literature did not yield any identifiable relationship between child characteristics and maltreatment in foster care. Cavara & Ogren (1983) found that children in foster care as maltreatment victims were more likely to be male and between 4 and 12 years of age. For children experiencing maltreatment in foster care, Hobbs, Hobbs & Wynne (1999) identified female gender, non-relative placement, developmental delay, and younger age as predicting heightened risk of maltreatment in foster care. Benedict, Zuravin, Somerfield, & Brandt (1996) found that the children who experienced maltreatment in foster care had a multitude of health, developmental, and behavior problems. Benedict, Zuravin, Brandt, & Abbey (1994) found that children in 14% of the

reports of maltreatment in foster homes required medical care. Clearly, more research is needed to understand the characteristics and needs of this vulnerable population.

Perpetrators of Maltreatment of Children in Foster Care. Research in this area has examined perpetrator type "(e.g., foster parent or other foster child) and, to a lesser extent, the characteristics of foster parents as perpetrators. In Illinois, Tittle, Poertner & Garnier (2002) found that, for children in foster care, 29% of perpetrators were foster parents, 29% were relative caregivers, 6% were institutional staff, and 8% were other children. Spencer & Knudsen (1992) found child perpetrators in 6% of all foster home cases.

In a number of related studies (Zuravin, Brandt, & Abbey, 1994; Zuravin, Benedict, & Somerfield, 1993; Benedict, Zuravin, Somerfield, & Brandt, 1996), researchers found that foster parents were the perpetrators in 40-80% of cases of child maltreatment in foster care.

Benedict, Zuravin, Brandt, & Abbey (1994) found foster parents were perpetrators in 80% of the abuse and neglect cases involving children in foster care, but foster parents were the perpetrator in only 40% of the sexual abuse cases. In contrast, Spencer & Knudsen (1992) found sexual abuse to more likely in foster homes and over twice as likely to be reported. The foster parent was the perpetrator in 78% of those sexual abuse cases.

Cavara & Ogren (1983) found that abusing foster parents were most often single, had children in their homes for longer placement times, and had no children of their own.

Substantiation Rates by Maltreatment Type. Substantiation rates for reports of physical abuse of children in foster care ranged from 38% to 65% (Zuravin, Brandt, & Abbey, 1994; Zuravin, Benedict, & Somerfield, 1993; Benedict, Zuravin, Somerfield, & Brandt, 1996). Substantiation rates for reports of sexual abuse of children in foster care ranged from 11% to 55% (Zuravin, Brandt, & Abbey, 1994; Zuravin, Benedict, & Somerfield, 1993; Benedict, Zuravin, Somerfield, & Brandt, 1996). And substantiation rates for reports of neglect of children in foster care ranged from 17% to 40% (Zuravin, Brandt, & Abbey, 1994; Zuravin, Benedict, & Somerfield, 1993; Benedict, Zuravin, Somerfield, & Brandt, 1996). Rosenthal, Motz, Edmonjson, & Groze (1991) found that the most frequent maltreatment type was physical abuse and that 38% of reports of abuse and neglect in foster homes were substantiated. Some of these rates were calculated including only foster caregiver maltreatment and some were calculated including all perpetrator types.

In Indiana, Spencer & Knudsen (1992) found the following rates of substantiated abuse and neglect of children in foster care per 1000 children at risk: 16.9 in family foster homes, 120.4 in residential care, 8.9 in institutional care, and 15.7 in hospitals or other settings. These rates per 1000 children include all perpetrator types (parents, foster parents, other caregivers, other children).

III. Methodology

The first group of analyses for this report, performance trends, was derived from Oklahoma's annual submissions to AFCARS and NCANDS for 1998-2001 and state reports for 2002-2003. The second section is comprised of descriptive analyses of child

characteristics, perpetrator characteristics, maltreatment types, and substantiation rates for the 1998-2001 time period.

Safety in Foster Care Performance Trends, Oklahoma, 1998-2001. The performance trends for the Safety in Foster Care federal measure were first calculated for each year following the syntax developed by W.R. McDonald & Associates for the Children's Bureau. Using the county codes included in Oklahoma's NCANDS submissions, Oklahoma counties were grouped by administrative area. Further analyses explored the performance trends within and between areas from January 1, 1998, through December 31, 2001. Those rates are presented in a series of tables: performance rates grouped by year, performance rates grouped by administrative area, and difference between performance rates and the federal standard of 0.57%.

Descriptive Analysis of Child Characteristics, Perpetrator Characteristics, Maltreatment Type, and Substantiation Rates. This analysis was conducted exclusively with NCANDS data as it was not possible to match the AFCARS and NCANDS files at the case level to provide more detailed analyses. Researchers attempted unsuccessfully to match NCANDS cases of maltreatment in foster care with Oklahoma KIDS data. For reasons of confidentiality, Oklahoma employs a practice of assigning new child identification numbers to children pursuant to reports of maltreatment by foster parents. Once the investigation of maltreatment by a foster parent is complete, the investigating worker should "merge" the investigation file with any existing files for that child by changing the identification number. However, fewer than 50% of the cases of maltreatment in foster care had been closed and correctly merged. Because of this

inability to match cases in both NCANDS and AFCARS, the analysis provided in this report is limited to the data available in NCANDS.

Due to the inability to cross reference children in both NCANDS and AFCARS files a sample of 805 children was selected from the NCANDS file of children who received some type of foster care services but were not maltreated by a foster parent. This sample was used as a comparison group with the 753 children who experienced maltreatment by a foster parent. This figure (753) is larger than the sum of the number of children maltreated by a foster parent identified for those four years in the federal measure because all child victims for the entire 12 months of each of the four years were included in this analysis. The federal measure includes only the first nine months of the year because of the different reporting years for AFCARS and NCANDS.

Comparisons between the two groups were made using chi square and t-test statistical analyses. Both statistical techniques compare two groups for statistically significant differences. The chi square test is used for dichotomous or categorical variables (i.e. yes/no, correct/wrong). The t-test is used to compare two groups by their mean scores or values on a continuous variable (i.e. age, total score).

Analyses were also conducted to identify the substantiation rates for reports of maltreatment by a foster parent. While those results are reported, they are of little value due to the practice of recording only the confirmed reports of foster parents starting in 2000. The final analysis reports the distribution of maltreatment types among children experiencing confirmed maltreatment by a foster parent for each of the four years included in this report.

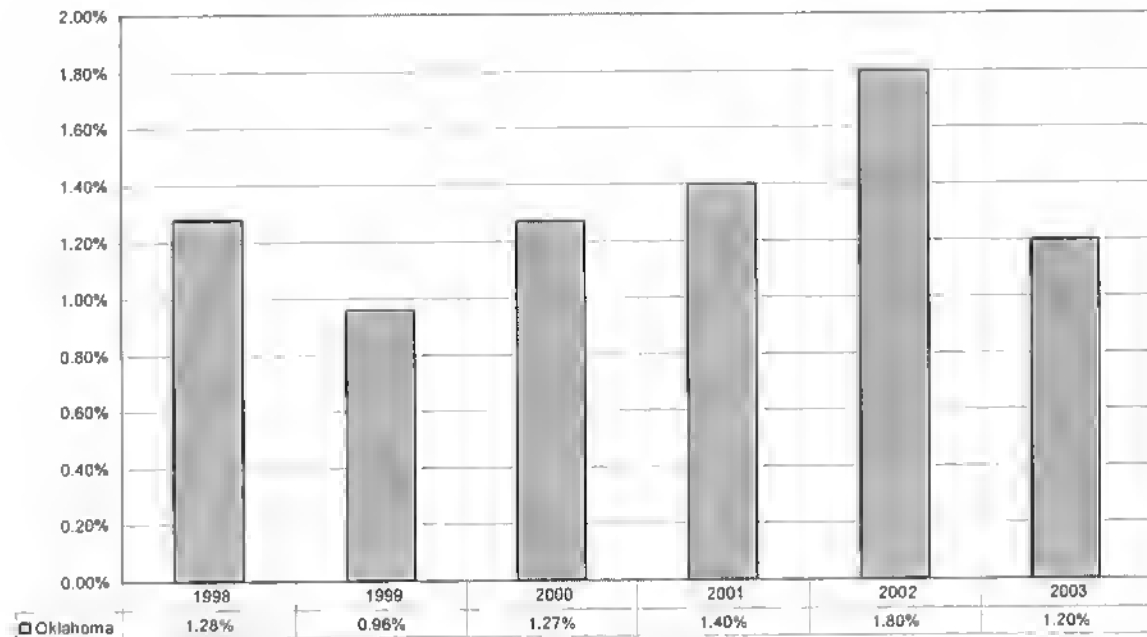
IV. Analysis

This section presents the findings from the analyses described in the Methodology section in tables and charts with descriptions.

Safety in Foster Care Performance Trends, Oklahoma, 1998-2003. Chart 1, below, summarizes the essential elements of the federal performance measure for the four years included in this analysis plus an additional two years provided by DHS in the KIDS Web Focus outcome reports. The number of children maltreated by a foster parent is derived from NCANDS data. The number of children in foster care is derived from AFCARS. The percentage or performance rate is then calculated by hand. Oklahoma has not met or exceeded the federal standard of 0.57% for any of the six years. Oklahoma's best performance was in 1999 and Oklahoma's worst performance was in 2002. The rate for child maltreatment by foster parent was lower in 2003, 1.17%, but still more than twice the federal standard rate.

Chart 1
Child Maltreatment in Foster Care: A Federal Outcome Measure
Oklahoma Performance, 1998-2003¹

Federal Outcome: Child Maltreatment in Out of Home Care
Statewide
(1998-2001 used data federal approved data, 2002-2003 KIDS Reports)



	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Children Maltreated by Foster Parent	147	114	158	184	243	158
Number of Children in Foster Care	11,483	11,868	12,478	13,141	13,707	13,499
Percentage Maltreated in Foster Care	1.28	0.96%	1.27%	1.40%	1.80%	1.20%

¹ Years 2002 and 2003 data come from KIDS Web Focus Reports, where 1998 and 2001 data come from reports derived from federally approved state NCANDS and AFCARS data.

Child Maltreatment Rates by Administrative Area

Chart 2, below, introduces the performance of Oklahoma's six administrative areas to the analysis for years 1998-2003. In Chart 2, Area performance rates are grouped by year. There are few, if any, recognizable trends in area performances. For two years, 1998 and 2001, Area 4 had the best performance on this measure, but in 1999, Area 4 had the worst performance. Area 1 had the best performance for the other two years, 1999 and 2000. However, Area 1 had the highest or worst performance rate for 2001. Although 2002 yielded Oklahoma's highest or worst performance rate on the safety in foster care measure, the highest or worst performance rate for any administrative area in any year was in Area 3 in 2001 with a maltreatment by foster parent rate of 2.53%, nearly five times the federal standard.

Chart 2

Child Maltreatment by Foster Parent:
Annual Trends by Area
Federal Standard = 0.57%

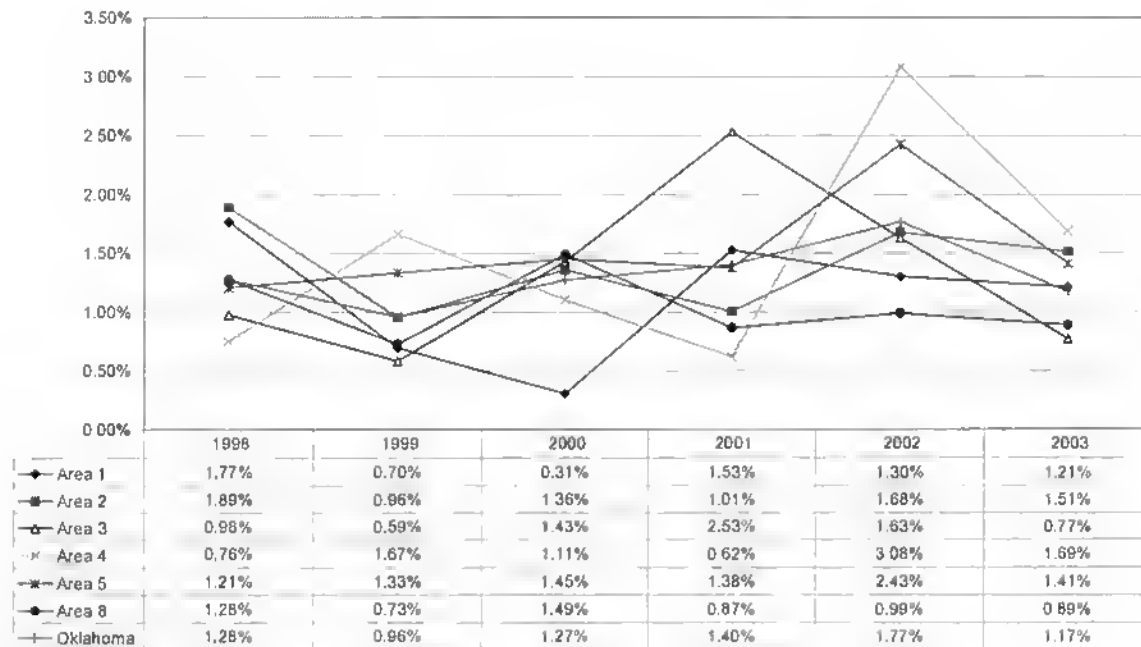


Chart 3, below, summarizes the same area performance rates for the same years as Chart 2. However, in Chart 3 administrative area performance rates are grouped by area rather than year to graphically illustrate within area performance trends. Area 6 demonstrates the most consistency in performance on this measure from year to year. Area 4 showed the widest fluctuations in performance on this measure, with a difference between 2000 and 2001 of nearly 2.5% or nearly five times the federal standard.

Chart 3

**Child Maltreatment by Foster Parents:
Annual Trends by Administrative Area
Federal Standard = 0.57%**

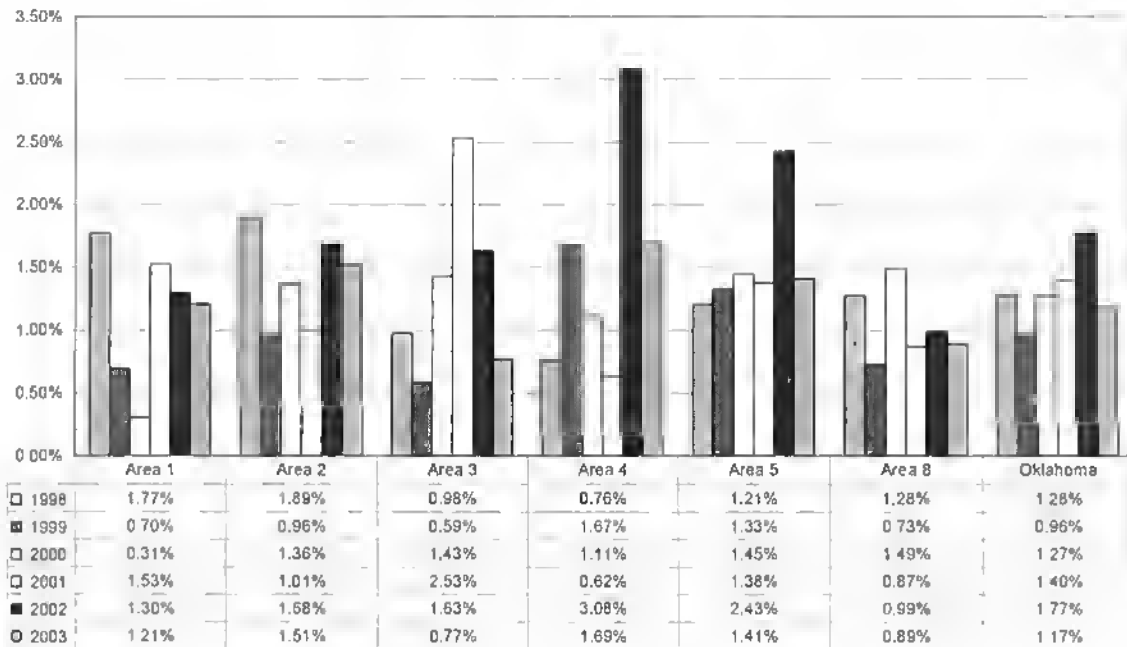
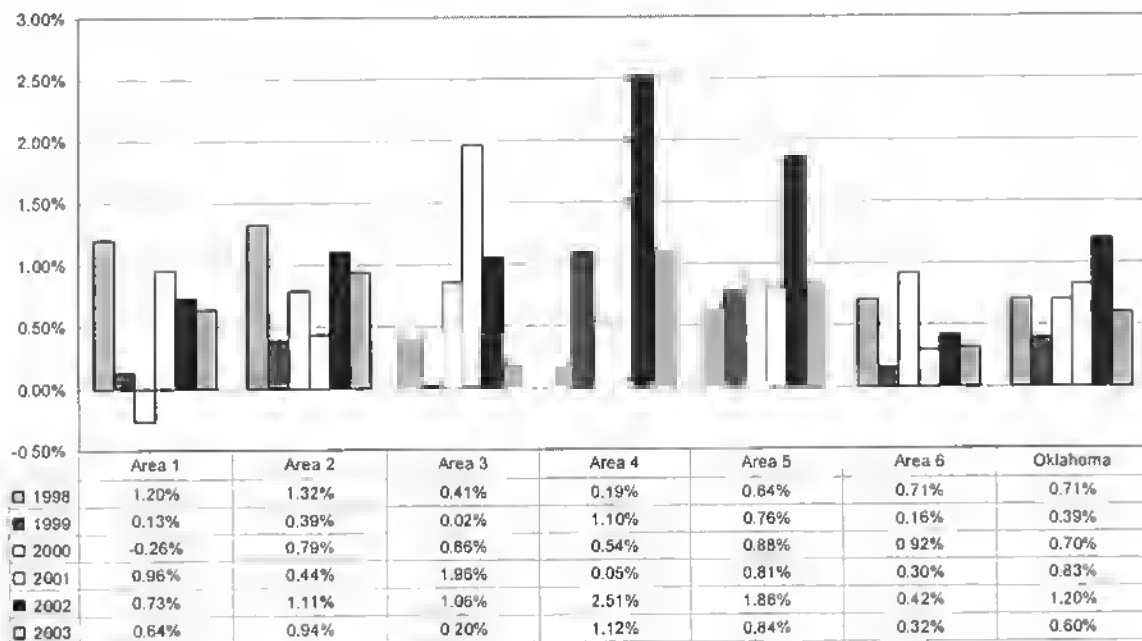


Chart 4, below, provides a graphic representation of the differences between performance rates and the federal standard performance rate for each administrative area and the state for each of the four years included in the analyses. Only one Oklahoma administrative area in one year met or exceeded the federal performance standard (0.57% or fewer of the children in foster care experiencing maltreatment). In 2000, Area 1 exceeded the federal standard by 0.26%, or about half. Area 4 came within 0.05% of meeting the federal measure in 2001. A dramatic increase in 2001 provided Area 3 with the highest administrative area rate for any of the four included years, 1.96%. It is notable that the dramatic increase in child maltreatment by foster

parents in Area 3 would have a significant impact on the statewide rate since Area 3 is Oklahoma's most populous administrative area. It is also noteworthy that along with an improvement in statewide rates of child maltreatment in foster care, area performances for 2003 were more consistent than for previous years.

Chart 4

Child Maltreatment by Foster Parents
Difference from Federal Standard (Performance Rate - Federal Standard Rate)
Federal Standard of 0.57% Is Represented as 0.00%



**Comparing Children Maltreated by Foster Parents with Children in Foster Care
but Not Maltreated**

Table 1 presents the comparison of children maltreated by foster parents with a randomly selected group of children who received foster care services but were not maltreated by foster parents. A total of 753 Oklahoma children were maltreated by a foster parent in the 48 months between January 1, 1998, and December 31, 2001. A random sample of 805 children who received foster care services but were not maltreated by a foster parent at any time was selected for purposes of comparison. Comparisons were tested for statistically significant differences using a t-test for child age, number of reports, and perpetrator age. All other comparisons were tested for statistically significant differences using the chi square test.

Table 1

Comparison of Children Maltreated by Foster Parents, 1998-2001*

		NCANDS Random Sample: Children with Foster Care Services Not Maltreated by Foster Parent	Child Experienced Substantiated Maltreatment BY a Foster Parent	
		N=805	N=753	N
Child Gender	Male	46.71%	49.00%	752
	Female	53.29%	51.00%	803
Child Age	Mean Age	6.55	7.85	1558
Child Race	Caucasian	57.4%	42.6%	903
	African American	30.9%	69.1%	350
	Native American	51.7%	48.3%	180
	Asian/Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	88.9%	11.1%	9
	Multi-racial	42.4%	57.6%	33
	Hispanic	57.6%	42.4%	85
	Undetermined	40.0%	60.0%	25
Total Number of Reports for Child	Mean Number of Reports	1.36	1.36	1585
Child Characteristics	Alcohol Abuse	1.10%	1.60%	13
In NCANDS child characteristic variables are individual variables, not categories within the same variable.	Drug Abuse	3.20%	2.70%	31
	Mental Retardation	1.00%	2.30%	18
	Emotionally Disturbed	1.90%	2.00%	13
	Learning Disability	1.90%	6.60%	52
	Physical Disability	1.10%	0.10%	3
	Behavior Problem	1.90%	6.60%	52

Table 1, cont'd.

Comparison of Children Maltreated by Foster Parents, 1998-2001*

		NCANDS Random Sample: Children with Foster Care Services Not Maltreated by Foster Parent	Child Experienced Substantiated Maltreatment BY a Foster Parent	N
Maltreatment Type	Physical Abuse	34.16%	38.78%	514
	Neglect	60.12%	51.39%	924
	Medical Neglect	0.87%	1.20%	16
	Sexual Abuse	2.48%	3.72%	67
	Psychological or Emotional	1.24%	3.19%	42
Birth Family Characteristics	Eligible for Public Assistance	50.80%	49.30%	677
Caretaker Characteristics	Alcohol Abuse	9.70%	4.50%	123
In NCANDS caretaker characteristic variables are individual variables, not categories within the same variable.	Drug Abuse	9.40%	3.10%	126
	Mental Retardation	0.10%	0.50%	2
	Emotionally Disturbed	0.60%	0.30%	7
	Visually/Hearing Impaired	0.10%	0.10%	2
	Learning Disability	0.20%	0.10%	2
	Physical Disability	0.20%	0.10%	2
Perpetrator Gender	Male	30.43%	26.03%	483
	Female	69.32%	73.84%	1096
Perpetrator Age	Mean Perpetrator Age	33.25	47.35	1585

Table 1, cont'd.

Comparison of Children Maltreated by Foster Parents, 1998-2001

		NCANDS Random Sample: Children with Foster Care Services Not Maltreated by Foster Parent	Child Experienced Substantiated Maltreatment BY a Foster Parent	N
Report Source	Social Services	3.60%	17.00%	142
	Medical	8.94%	2.79%	87
	Mental Health	0.87%	8.10%	76
	Legal, Law Enforcement	25.09%	4.25%	213
	Education Personnel	7.08%	5.98%	131
	Child Day Care Provider	0.87%	0.53%	11
	Alleged Victim	0.75%	1.73%	14
	Parent	1.49%	1.59%	44
	Other Relative	7.08%	4.12%	106
	Friends or Neighbor	1.37%	0.53%	32
	Alleged Perpetrator	0.75%	1.73%	3
	Anonymous Reporter	14.04%	13.41%	218
	Other	6.34%	10.36%	148
	Unknown or Missing	22.11%	29.22%	360
Services	Post Investigation	54.50%	13.30%	291
	Family Support	16.30%	1.40%	29
	Family Preservation	7.60%	1.20%	29
	Foster Care	100.00%	15.70%	359
	Adoption	15.40%	17.00%	168
	Case Management	58.80%	24.00%	397
	Counseling	10.10%	3.20%	61
	Day Care	15.40%	5.20%	60
	Educational & Training	0.70%	0.40%	9
	Home Health/Health	3.20%	1.20%	29
	Independent/Trans. Living	1.90%	0.80%	15
	Mental Health	1.00%	0.50%	11
	Respite	6.60%	1.20%	19
	Other	29.10%	10.60%	202

In NCANDS service variables are individual variables, not categories within the same variable.

Child Characteristics

Slightly more female than male children experienced maltreatment in foster care for both groups. Children maltreated by foster parents were 1.30 years older than children in the comparison group, a statistically significant difference.

The child race data was incomplete for large numbers of cases. Additionally, NCANDS separates each ethnicity into a separate variable. The percentages presented in the table, then are the percentage of the total children for whom data was reported that were indicated with a yes for that variable, or item. Many child records did not include any data at all for race. Others, consistent with more recent NCANDS practice, included more than one race for an individual child as appropriate. This combination of factors limits the inferences that can be drawn from this data.

The way that children's ethnicity or race is entered directly into NCANDS makes interpretation of data difficult. Each race is a separate variable. To facilitate comparisons between ethnic groups and the two groups of children summarized in Table 1, researchers combined the separate race variables into a single variable with seven categories: Caucasian, African American, Native American, Asian/Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (these groups were combined because of the very small of numbers of children in each), Multi-Racial (not Hispanic) and Hispanic. Differences, on the basis of ethnicity, were statistically significant between the group of children maltreatment by foster parents and the groups of children in foster care but not maltreated by foster parents. Caucasian and Hispanic children were much more likely to be in the group of children in foster care but not maltreated by a foster parent (57.4% v 42.6% for Caucasian children; 57.6% v. 42.4% for Hispanic children). Native

American children were very slightly more likely to be in the group of children in foster care but maltreated by foster parents (51.75% v. 48.3%). Both children identified as multi-racial, but not Hispanic, and children with undetermined ethnicity were more likely to be in the group of children maltreated by a foster parent (42.4% v. 57.6% for multi-racial children; 40% v. 60% for children with undetermined ethnicity). African American children were much more likely to be in the group of children maltreated by a foster parent (30.9% v. 69.1%).

The mean number of reports per child was identical for the two groups at 1.36. Interpretation of this data is limited by Oklahoma's practice of not processing reports and substantiations of abuse and neglect by foster parents in a different manner than reports of maltreatment by other perpetrators.

The number of children for whom the child characteristics and the caretaker characteristics data fields were completed was too small to support meaningful interpretation of the data. However, among the cases for which data were provided, children with Mental Retardation, Learning Disabilities, and Behavior Problems were more likely to be maltreated by foster parents than comparison group children at statistically significant levels.

Maltreatment Types

The distribution of the types of maltreatment is statistically different between the two groups. Consistent with the literature, physical abuse and sexual abuse were more common in the maltreated by foster parent group (38.78% versus 34.16% and 3.72% versus 2.48%, respectively). Medical neglect (1.20% versus 0.87%) and psychological or emotional neglect (3.19% versus 1.24%) were also more common in the maltreated

by foster parent group than the comparison group. Only neglect was more common among comparison group children than maltreated by foster parent children (60.12% versus 51.39%).

Perpetrator Characteristics

Perpetrators who were not foster parents were more than twice as likely to be identified as having drug or alcohol problems as foster parent caretakers, a statistically significant difference. However, the number of perpetrators for whom this data was available was very small for both groups. Perpetrator gender differences were not significant between the two groups. However, the mean perpetrator age was significantly different between the two groups with foster parent perpetrators (47.35 years of age) nearly 14 years older than non-foster parent perpetrators (33.25 years of age).

Report Source

Report source distribution was significantly different between the two groups. Children maltreated by a foster parent were most likely to be reported by social services personnel while children not maltreated by a foster parent were mostly likely to be reported by legal or law enforcement sources.

Services

The services data is comprised of a series of individual questions, similar to the child race data. Problems with workers failing to complete the data are exemplified by the differences between the two comparison groups for the foster care services variable. The comparison group demonstrates 100% for foster care services because an indication of foster care services in the NCANDS data was part of the selection

process for that group. However, of the children experiencing maltreatment by a foster parent, only 15.7% are indicated to have received foster care services. In general, children not maltreated by a foster parent appear to receive significantly more services of all types, except adoption, than children maltreated by a foster parent. What is not clear is the extent to which Oklahoma's reporting practices explain these differences versus the differences actually existing between the two groups.

Maltreatment Type for Child Maltreatment by Foster Parents

Table 3 summarizes the annual distribution of maltreatment types for children maltreated by a foster parent. A notable shift occurs between 1999 and 2000. In 1998 and 1999 the majority of maltreatment episodes involved physical abuse, consistent with other findings in the literature. However, in 2000 and 2001, this shifts to a higher prevalence of neglect, which is not consistent with other findings in the literature. Additionally, the incidence of sexual abuse by foster parents appears to be lower in Oklahoma than that identified by researchers for other areas of the country.

Table 3

	Maltreatment Type in Reports of Maltreatment by Foster Parent					
	Physical Abuse	Neglect	Medical Neglect	Sexual Abuse	Psychological Abuse	Total
1998	129 51.60%	97 38.80%	2 0.80%	5 2%	15 6%	250 100%
1999	91 46.67%	74 37.95%	3 1.54%	5 2.56%	12 6.15%	195 100%
2000	80 36.53%	121 55.25%	1 0.46%	13 5.94%	3 1.37%	219 100%
2001	77 29.50%	164 62.84%	3 1.15%	9 3.45%	8 3.07%	261 100%

V. Summary and Conclusions

The most compelling finding from among the analyses in this report is the simple fact that Oklahoma's rate of Child Maltreatment in Foster Care is over twice the national standard of no more than 0.57% of foster children experiencing maltreatment in foster care . Oklahoma's rate increased steadily from 1999 (0.96%) through 2002 (1.80%). It then dropped to 1.20% for 2003. Given the state's responsibility to both protect the children in its care and to strive to meet the federal child welfare performance standards, this report presents findings from this preliminary inquiry that may be useful to target program improvement efforts. Further analysis on this outcome measure is recommended.

In the January, 2003, Program Improvement Plan, Oklahoma's strategy for improving performance on this outcome was to: "Research past years' confirmations of foster parent maltreatment, and, as appropriate, train staff conducting investigations on procedures to appropriately distinguish contractual infractions from findings of abuse or neglect". Since the rate and number of confirmed abuse neglect reports declined from 2002 (243 children, 1.80%) to 2003 (158 children, 1.20%), it is possible that the training did positively impact the rate of child maltreatment in foster care. It is also possible that children were actually safer in foster care in 2002 than they were in 2003. Without more detailed analysis, one can only speculate on the reasons for the improvement in this measure at this time.

The federal rate of Child Maltreatment in Foster Care was examined by administrative area for six years. There were few, if any, recognizable trends in the rates of maltreatment between the administrative areas using the federal measure.

Although NCANDS data for 2003 was not available for this analysis, the KIDS WebFocus reporting system indicates that Oklahoma's performance on this measure improved in 2003. It is noteworthy that performance on this measure across areas was more consistent in 2003 than in previous years.

Comparing Children Maltreated by Foster Parents with Children in Foster Care but Not Maltreated

In this report, researchers planned to examine maltreatment in foster care to identify likely targets for interventions that could be incorporated into the state's Program Improvement Plan. Toward this end, researchers constructed a multi-year NCANDS file to compare children maltreated by a foster parent (n=753) with a random sample of children in foster care but not maltreated by a foster parent (n=805). This analysis yielded a number of findings that may be useful to guide further research and to inform improvement efforts for this outcome.

Age – Children maltreated by foster parents were 1.3 years older than other foster children (mean age of 7.85 v. 6.55).

Race –African American and non-Hispanic multi-racial children may be more likely to experience child maltreatment by foster parents than other ethnic groups of children.

Child Disability – The following characteristics were found to be more prevalent among children maltreated by foster parents than among children in the not maltreated comparison group:

- Mental retardation (2.3% versus 1.00, n=18);
- Learning disability (6.6% versus 1.9%, n=52);

- Behavior problem (6.6% versus 1.9%, n=52).

Type of Maltreatment – During the four years included in the comparison analysis, neglect became the most prevalent form of child maltreatment in foster care. In 2001 neglect represented 62.8% of all the maltreatment by foster parents as compared to 29.5% physical abuse, and 3.5% sexual abuse. This finding is inconsistent with other research.

Services - Although the service data elements were among those not fully completed for all cases, the analysis indicates that children maltreated by foster parents were far less likely to receive any form of services than their non-maltreated peers in foster care.

The indicated absence of services for children maltreated in foster care, coupled with the earlier observation that children with special needs may be more likely to experience maltreatment in foster care, emphasizes the importance of pursuing a more rigorous analysis of this outcome measure.

The findings from this analysis should be considered in light of the limitations of available data. Not all of the NCANDS data elements were completed for all children. For example, of the children with a confirmed abuse/neglect where the perpetrator was a foster parent, only 15.7% also indicated that the child had received foster care services. A further limitation arose when researchers were not able to merge the report based data from NCANDS with the placement episode data from AFCARS or KIDS. About half of the cases of child maltreatment in foster care did match, but the differences between the group that matched and the group that didn't match were too many for researchers to continue the analysis. This problem occurred when workers

had not properly merged child identification numbers at the close of the maltreatment by foster parent investigations. Future research would be enhanced if these data were corrected.

Potential Program Improvement Strategies

Oklahoma's Program Improvement Plan (PIP) appropriately identifies the need for additional research in the area of maltreatment in foster care. This study provides some preliminary findings and suggests directions for further enquiry. More detailed information gleaned from additional research would help to identify successful program improvement strategies.

A. Further Research

This section summarizes three avenues for further research on this outcome measure. Any of the three approaches would substantially increase understanding of child maltreatment in foster care in Oklahoma. Implementation of all three approaches would provide a comprehensive portrait of this outcome measure, as well as clear indications of the most promising direction for programmatic changes. The first approach, collecting specified data elements from case files, offers researchers and administrators the opportunity to accumulate more in-depth data specific to their questions about this outcome measure. The second approach, interviewing foster parents, offers researchers and administrators a new and unique perspective on both the problem of child maltreatment in foster care and foster parents' perspective of the value and utility of the training and support services they receive. The third first approach, conducting further data analysis using corrected administrative data, builds most directly on the current report.

1. Gathering specified data from case files for a specified period of time, perhaps one year, may provide the most comprehensive analyses of this outcome measure. Additional analyses including all reports are recommended to fully describe the maltreatment experiences of Oklahoma foster children. Oklahoma administrators have already specifically identified the disposition of these reports as an area of concern in the state's PIP, and the results of this study support that concern. If resources to conduct such a review are too limited, gathering data from cases with only confirmed reports could be done. However, this more limited analysis would not fully describe the disposition process of this unique group of reports of child maltreatment. Findings from this NCANDS based analysis could be used to frame a protocol for gathering the necessary data. For example, this report shows that children maltreated by a foster parent tend to be older, have more disabilities and behavior problems, and are provided fewer services. The case review protocol could tabulate these factors more accurately and thoroughly than NCANDS (e.g. level of disability, frequency and duration of services provided to the child, the skill and preparation of foster parents, and the level of support or services provided to the foster parents). The case review protocol could also include data about the specific reasons for confirming or not confirming the report. Since neglect has become the most prevalent maltreatment type among foster parents in Oklahoma, an analysis of data comprehensively summarizing this decision making process could be very useful for Oklahoma child welfare administrators.

2. Conducting a series of interviews or focus groups with foster parents, including those with maltreatment reports, is another way of learning more about the perceived level of support being provided to foster parents. These interviews could provide both feedback on the existing foster parent support activities (e.g. training, crisis assistance) as well as insights about unaddressed foster parents needs and challenges. Agencies may shy away from conducting focus groups or interviews out of fear that foster parents will identify needs that are beyond the means of the agency. However, focus groups and interviews can also help to identify the most and least useful components of existing support activities. This information is highly useful to administrators seeking to provide the most effective supports to foster parents at the least cost.
3. Additional Data Analysis Using Administrative Data (KIDS) would be an effective strategy to address some of the limitations of the research presented in this report. The research literature presents data on the maltreatment of children in foster care from a broader perspective than the federal measure for maltreatment in care. For instance, additional data analysis could examine children's safety in foster care regardless of the perpetrator or the relationship between length of time in placement and foster parent maltreatment. This research task requires that case identification numbers are correctly merged for reported and confirmed cases of maltreatment by foster parents, thus permitting researchers to match case records between the placement record (AFCARS or KIDS) and the maltreatment data file (NCANDS). With this single correction in the available data, researchers could provide a much more precise portrait of the differences

between children maltreated in foster care and their non-maltreated foster child peers. Potentially, services factors (e.g. contact with children, foster parent visits, services) could be examined for their impact on maltreatment in care.

B. Support Services for Foster Parents

Several findings in this report point to the need for additional support for foster parents (i.e., the prevalence of neglect, older children, African American children, children with disabilities, and children with behavior problems). In particular, the fact that neglect is the most prevalent form of maltreatment by foster parents raises questions about the licensing, training, and supervision of foster homes. For homes that are of sufficient quality to be licensed for foster care, it seems likely that most instances of neglect could be prevented easily.

The fact that children maltreated in foster care tend to be older than their peers may indicate a need to increase the familiarity of foster parents with the competing and conflicting needs of latency-aged and adolescent children to differentiate themselves from their adult caretakers and at the same time to feel emotionally close to those same caretakers. Also, challenging child behaviors can be exacerbated by traumatic experiences such as maltreatment and foster care placement. Responses to these challenges and others, such as children with disabilities, suggest the need for increased support of foster parents. This support can be provided in many different ways. The following is a list of suggested ways to support foster parents:

- Mentoring program pairing experienced foster parents with new foster parents
- Access for foster parents to immediate help in times of crisis (hotline)

- Ensure that foster children are receiving necessary services and that foster parents are informed of the need for services
- Communicate all of child's needs and expectations for their care clearly to foster parents
- Regular social worker contact with foster parents and child
- Routinely assess the need of children for special education services; follow up to assure those services are provided
- Tap into extra-agency local resources (e.g., schools, CASA agencies, other community agencies committed to helping children and families)
- Recognition and appreciation activities
- Ongoing training, including cultural sensitivity and developmentally appropriate behavior expectations
- Respite care and/or attendant care (for children with disabilities)

There are many other creative ways that effective and low cost support services can be provided to support foster parents.

It is critical to the effort of protecting Oklahoma's most vulnerable children to know more about the causal relationships between children's foster care history and maltreatment while in out of home care. Further study of maltreatment of children in care would provide valuable insights to guide strategies for improving performance on this important outcome. Until the recommended studies can be completed, researchers recommend that administrators pursue creative, but fiscally conservative, ways to support and mentor foster parents.

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